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Rosemary Press
Brochures

The Village Band

(A Sermon in Puppyrel)

By

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE

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THE VILLAGE BAND

(A Sermon in Puppyrel)

By Nathan Haskell Dole

Among the Berkshires lies a village,
Whose straggling houses line the still edge
Of somber hills, first cousins to mountains,
From whose wild caverns flow the fountains
That feed a wide and turbulent brook
On which those straggling houses look.
The landscape, called by artists charming,
Has small advantages for farming;
But Nature, seeming so penurious,
Hid 'neath the hills, to tempt the curious,
A marvellous inexhaustible store
Of glittering sulfurous copper ore:—
"Fools' gold" men sometimes call this treasure—
A hoard that Ignorance could not measure
And so for ages long neglected it,
Till Science with her wand detected it;
And then the sleepy little village,
No more dependent on lean tillage,
Became a prosperous mining-center, prizing
The change accomplisht by the enterprizing.
Among the innocent diversions
Devised to obviate desertions
And make the young men more contented
(For Movies were not then invented!)
There was a lively Village Band

Which played in Summer in a stand
Ornate, octagonal, many-colored
To suit the taste of boor or dullard.
Each Thursday evening and each Saturday—
(Tho' more distinctive was the latter day—
Approaching closely to an estival
Commemoration, Fête, or festival)
This famous rural Band assembled
While still the Sun God's last rays trembled
Across the forest-shrouded summits;
But even darkness could not dumb its
Enthusiastic rendering of medley
Potpourri, polka, waltz or deadly
Attempt to keep a march in time:—
Their leader's efforts were sublime,
And all the country population
Provided with a generous ration
Of peanuts, cornballs, cake and candy
Met promenading through the sandy
Deep-rutted littered street that skirted
The small square where the young folks flirted,
And old men doddered dully listening
Half-hypnotized by brass so glistening.

It was the weirdest aggregation
Of instruments in all creation:
A small Italian known as Niccolo
Evolved weird wailings from the piccolo;
But as he also blew the tuba,
The horn and trumpet, was the Poo-bah
And thought himself a stupid dunce
Unable to play four at once,
But still good-natured he succeeded

In filling vacancies as needed.
Two Teutons tooted a tout-ensemble
That made the very heavens to rumble,
Lavishing breath on black bassoons,
Their red cheeks swelling like balloons.
The "popular clerk" of the Apothecary's
(As papers put it)—in no wise loth, he carries
The cymbals and the big bass drum
(With a cling-clang, cling-clang, bum-bum-bum),
And the bell-boy from the one hotel
On the snare-drum raised a hectic Hell
(To borrow from Billy Sunday's vocabulary
Permitted by the State constabulary!)
A farmer's son—his mother's pet
Puft vigorously on the clarinet,
And by good luck a wandering hobo
Was found proficient on the oboe.
A tall cadaverous foreign fellow
(A Fin, I think) sawed at the 'cello
And got a tone, though nasal, mellow.
And a little Jew jabbed at the giant fiddle
Tho' he barely reacht up to its middle:
How such long strings he manipulated
Was marvellous; but I know he stipulated
That they should furnish him a criket.
He sighed contented: "Dot's der ticket!"
The Leader tried to give the rhythm
But time was hardly ever with him—
Perhaps the joke is rather grim:
We might say that the Time beat him.

Ambrosial drafts one should imbibe
Ere starting boldly to describe

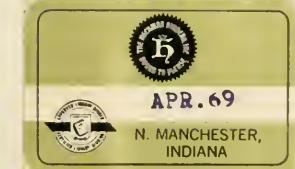
A concert by these rare musicians:—
Such gasps and bangs, such blast-emissions,
Such woful, awful, dire, cacophonies
(Where pleasing melody not often is!)
I will not try it, since the Muse
To help me do it would refuse!

One afternoon I took the road
That skirted where the river flowed
And wandered idly miles and miles,
Up thro' the high hills' wild defiles;
Then turning as the darkness fell,
I reacht a captivating dell
And sat down in the evening hush
To listen to the hermit thrush
Whose sweet voice in the solitude
With melancholy seemed imbued;
When suddenly my soul was stirred
Not by the cadenced song of bird,
But by a magic rush of sound
Which seemed to flood from all around,
As if it issued from the ground,
As if it burst like vocal fountains
Out from the bosom of the mountains,
As if it came from upper air,—
A solemn Music—Nature's prayer!
The shadow-brooding mountain-side
I saw in fancy opened wide
And in the high-arched temple vaulted
Which lofty ebon piers exalted
I seemed to see an organ buried,
With rows of pipes in order serried—
Bourdon and trumpet, reed and flute,

And all the varied stops that suit
The complicated harmonies
Wrought by the Master on his keys.
The Music that around me welled
And all my raptured spirit held
Seemed like the music of the Spheres,
Not meant for sluggish mortal ears:—
It rose and fell in shadowy waves
Quite untranscribable on the staves
That symbolize to eye and mind
What those initiated find
And by that secret inward ear
Which hears more than one seems to hear.

Not long did Fancy conjure treason
Against superior human Reason.
I knew full well that mountain-side
No magic instrument could hide,
That those weird melodies symphonious
Were but the echoes made harmonious,
Of that far-distant rustic band,
Down at the village, in their stand!
And Mother Nature, sensitive,
Had sifted with her fancy sieve
The floating notes, confused and jarring
Discarding those that might be marring,
Selecting such as in their far ring
Would be most pleasing to be heard
By prowling fox or hermit bird,
Or even by a wandering Poet,
Who, finding loveliness, would know it.
This seems to me a sort of parable—
Here in this epoch harsh, unbearable.

Where all the world is discord-blended,
And Civilization's hope seems ended,
We who are seated on the grand-stand
And hear the orgy from the band-stand,
Find only discord and cacophonies,
Where naught to harmonize and soften is.
But when we pass the Now's confusion,—
I hope it will not be illusion—
The echoes of the bitter strife
Striking upon the hills of Life,
Mayhap by Nature's mystic sieve
Undreamed-of harmonies will give;
The terrors of War's blatant brass
Into the chords of Peace shall pass;
The banging of the brutal drum
Like a deep organ-tone shall come;
The cries of anguish shall be dumb!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